THE STORY OF WILLIAM CHIDLOW

SPRINGFIELD

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THE STORY OF WILLIAM CHIDLOW 1807 - 1879

The Chidlow family of Tilley Green, Wem in Shropshire England came from ancestors whose name was mentioned as a land owner in the Doomsday Book, at the time of William the Conqueror. There were four sons - John, Henry, Peter and William.

Henry was the first of the Chidlow men to migrate to the Swan River Colony in Western Australia. He arrived with his wife and three children in the 'Minstrell' on 20th January 1830. He stayed a few years and then moved on to the Upper Stuart Valley in South Australia.

Peter and William set sail from England in the 'Rambler'. They travelled with John Morrell and his family and other members of his group. John Morrell expected to obtain a land grant in the new colony and no doubt envisaged a promising future.

The 'Rambler' dropped anchor at the Cape of Good Hope on Christmas Day. John Morrell's 18 year old son who had journeyed out earlier met his father, and they purchased vines, trees, potatoes and other requirements for their future farm. Both Morrell junior and Peter Chidlow stayed on at the Cape, whilst the others set sail for Western Australia in the 'Eliza'. Peter stayed behind for the express purpose of purchasing livestock and equipment. The horses he bought here were to be the forerunners of William's 'Cape Horses'.

The 'Eliza' reached its destination on March 5, 1831. Unfortunately the ship fouled a sandbank about thirteen miles south of Fremantle near Clarence. Small boats had to transport the passengers and goods to the beach, where women and children were carried ashore - the men and boys wading through the water.

When Captain James Stirling pressed the British Government for a settlement on the Swan River in Western Australia, it was agreed that the colonists would at first be allotted land grants on the basis of one acre for every 1/6d. invested in goods and stock. For each worker brought out, another 200 acres would be supplied. To secure their titles the allotted land must be cleared and improved within ten years of grant, for title to be given, or the grant would be forfeited. Those who arrived in Western Australia during the first three months of 1831 received a special grant at half the former rate and their location duties had to be completed within four years.

After March 1831 crown land had to be purchased at five shillings per acre.

In order to receive his grant John Morrell listed his group as follows :-

John Morrell	45 years	Builder
Ann Morrell	42 years	
John Morrell	19 years	Bricklayer
Frederich Morrell	10 years	
Ann Morrell	7 years	
Cleaphas Chappell	24 years	Carpenter
Benjamin Thorp	30 years	Labourer
Jane Thorp	27 years	
Efrain Thorp	5 years	
Ann Thorp	3 years	
Mary Thorp	7½ years	
Peter Chidlow	27 years	Labourer
William Chidlow	24 years	Labourer

With his goods and equipment and livestock John Morrell was eligible for 4,6000 acres of land. He applied to take up the land in the Avon Valley at Northam.

Morrell's eldest son Richard joined the family in January 1832. He was by trade a carpenter.

With a bullock drawn dray John Morrell set out in July 1832 to inspect his grant. From Guildford he followed the cart track to York and from there he cut his own track through to Northam.

He then returned to the settlement and engaged in building activities in Fremantle and Perth.

His first wife died in child birth in 1833 and was the first white woman to be buried in Fremantle cemetery. He remarried the following year.

Soon after their arrival in Fremantle, Peter and William Chidlow purchased a building on the town allotment 179 on January 31st 1832. The following year they purchased further allotments in Fremantle and William lived for a time near the Canning River.

The boundaries of John Morrell's land grant was finally decided on January 23rd 1836. It was about 25 miles down the Avon River from Mount Bakewell, and here in 1836 he built 'Morby' cottage. The home was made from crude materials and yet still stands today in York Road, north of Northam township. It's hand-made portals are well worth inspecting. The national Heritage has granted $9,000 to Northam Council for its restoration.

'Morby' had the distinction of being the first house built 'over the hill' possessing glass windows. Their safe transport along the rough road must have been extremely difficult.

Peter and William Chidlow had land almost enclosed by the bend in the river where the Mortlock River meets the Avon. It was, and still is, called 'Island Farm'.

The Morrells had not done much in the way of cultivation whereas the Chidlows were experienced agriculturists. Peter Chidlow agreed to carry out the location duties of Morrells property, together with William, within the specified time of the grant, on the condition, that he be given 'Springfield' - a portion

of the property, when the location duties were completed.

The farm soon showed results of the brothers industry.

EXTRACT SWAN RIVER GUARDIAN OCTOBER 13TH, 1836

Acres cleared

Heal	4
Morrell & Chidlow	25
Dodd	5
Monger	4

Within a short time Peter arrived in Perth with one and a half hundredweight of butter, it was reported to be far superior to any that had been imported into the colony.

The Chidlows made many journeys to the coast tracking over the hills with produce or supplies between the Swan River Settlement and the Avon Valley. It was a two or three day trip through the Darling Ranges, a distance of more than sixty miles. One of their overnight stopping places was at a well, sunk by William, where they watered their teams and travelling stock. The camping place became known as Chidlow's Well and began to attract settlers. Although the well is filled in, it can still be found at the town of Chidlow on Harbond's property. A brass tablet in memory of William Chidlow can be seen on the wishing well at the Chidlow State School.

Tragedy struck in July 1837. Peter Chidlow was engaged in doing location duties with Edward Jones (who was William's partner) on Mrs. Lyttleton's grant at Katrine about four miles from Northam, when they were attacked by a party of aborigines. Some say the two men were sitting on a large rock eating their lunch at the time, others say the natives were angry because they wanted Peter and Edward to give them some 'flour' that was nearby. The 'flour' was builders lime and naturally the pair refused to hand it over for the blacks to eat. Whatever the reason both men were speared to death.

Hearing from one of his employees that Peter and Edward Jones could be speared, William went to search for his brother. He was accompanied by John Morrell, a soldier, and a man called Banks. About 100 yards from a hut which was burnt to the ground, William picked up his brothers gun. They could find no other evidence that night but the following morning when they returned at daylight they found Peter's body buried under 18" of mud. There were seven spear wounds in his body and William saw that his jaw was broken. They were unable to find Jones or the seventeen head of cattle, that Peter had had with him, eight of them were in yoke. Another farmer found Edward Jones' body with some spears in him.

The cattle were recovered with the exception of one which was killed by the natives. A week after the murders - a bullock with a spear still in its neck turned up at Edward Jones' farm at Guildford. It had walked a distance of 50 miles.

It seems that reprisals were taken against the native family involved in the killings. Many were shot in retaliation.

A Northam Shire Councillor, Doug Morgan suggested that a tourist spot be constructed near the rock at Katrine where Jones and Chidlow were speared.

Peter was 35 years old when he was killed on June 15th 1837. He and Edward Jones were buried in a joint grave on the hillslope above Morrell's homestead. The spearing was reported in detail in 'The Perth Gazette' July 22 1837. Both men were highly respected in the colony.

The area on which their monument stands was given to the people of Northam by the late Mr. F. McKinnell, whose wife Marguerite is William's great grandaughter.

John Morell was given the title of Avon Location P on December 27th 1837.

Peter Chidlow's worldly effects by English law passed to the eldest brother in the family, that is to John Chidlow in England.

In 1840-41 William took a passage home to England where he arranged to purchase Peter's colonial properties from John for 200 pounds. He then returned to the Swan settlement in Western Australia, where he discussed the situation with John Morrell.

William agreed to finish the location duties that were previously being performed by Peter Chidlow before his untimely death. In consideration of the conditions being fulfilled by William, John Morrell conveyed to him, 1,450 acres near Northam called Springfield, and 1 chain in Northam, on October 17th 1842.

William also received by conveyance four allotments 23, 24, 33, and 34 in Fremantle, that he had owned in partnership with Peter.

William Chidlow was now a man of property. It is reported that he, together with three other colonial farmers, exported a shipment of wethers to the Isle of France in the 'Trusty' in 1843.

He was sadly shocked a short time after this to learn of the death of John Morrell with whom he had been closely involved since his arrival in the colony thirteen years previously.

John Morrell died at the expense of a practical joke. Whilst washing sheep, which was undertaken by hand, dunking and rubbing in the river by a line of men passing the sheep from one to another, one of the men was pushed in for fun. When he failed to surface John Morrell dived into the icy water and pulled the drowning man to safety. Unfortunately both rescued and rescuer died of pneumonia within a fortnight of each other.

John Morrell was buried on a hillside he had already chosen. He died 18th October 1843. W. Morgan in 1902 arranged the erection of a monument over Morrell's grave and John Morrell was designated as 'Founder of Northam' The monument was re-erected in 1965 on the Goomalling Road verge.

William Chidlow married Mary Woodward (1818-1866) on April 11th 1844.

Mary had been a member of a well known family of some standing in the county of Worcester in England. Her parents Sarah and James Woodward came to the colony on Thomas Peel's second ship 'Hooghley' on 13th February 1830. James was a parson. He and two of his sons died at Clarence shortly after their arrival. Mary had three sisters, Sarah, (single) Anne (Mrs. John Wellard of Whitby Falls) and Ellen, (Mrs. Barry Wood then Mrs. Edward Newman of Fremantle), and a brother Henry (no records obtained). Mary's mother opened a school for young ladies in Fremantle and Mary was well educated. She was 26 years at her marriage and William was 38 years.

They settled down on the part of his land called Island Farm. Their first daughter, Mary Ann was born here in July 1846 and Suzannah in July 1849.

William was troubled by new boundaries that had been drawn up in the Northam district. Actually in the beginning stages of colonization the boundaries at times were not well defined. When they were properly drawn it was found that William, Fred Norrell and Mr. Manning had each built on the others property and that 10 acres of Williams' wheatfield were on the townsite.

William wrote a letter to the Hon. I. Roe the Surveyor General re the adoption of boundary lines. He suggested the following re-allocation.

	Acres	Chains	Perches
Morrell to Chidlow	4	0	7
Manning to Morrell	4	2	38
The Crown to Chidlow	6	1	8
Chidlow to Manning	6	1	8

William was particularly provoked regarding his wheatfield. He wrote on 3rd August 1846 :

"About ten acres of my wheatfield originally within the lines described as bounding my land, has lately been thrown into the townsite of Northam. The said field has been brought into a high state of cultivation under the most disadvantageous circumstances by hard labour and a considerable outlay of capitol, having in fact from a stony unproductive hill been converted into a fruitful field - a field which I assure you it is hard to lose as it is well known I have, and which, I am sure you would be the last gentleman to propose that I should be deprived of surrounded as it is by a substantial fence made of mahogony, which I bought upwards of fourteen miles, just a few rails at a time, because I felt a sort of pride in my field and did not think the timber in the vicinity good enough for it".

He goes on to point out what a poor townsite it would make especially as there are no permanent pools in that part of the river.

However despite his protests the government would not allow him to purchase that part of Island Farm where he had his wheatfield.

This was to remain a thorn in his side for many years.

Mary and William were happy in their home on Island Farm. However since the house was threatened often by flood waters in the winter, William decided to build a new and larger home on the hill above Island Farm on his property Springfield.

He was his own architect and built a substantial two-storey home which he called Rosemount. He had imported briar roses and planted them as fences in the English style. The walls of the house were very thick, with large open fireplaces and narrow steep staircases. The second storey had low ceilings supported by wooden girders. An avenue of almond trees led to the entrance.

The home was later renamed Springfield. It was a house with much charm and with Mary's and William's hospitality it soon became the centre for many social activities in the district. The large dining room became known as 'Chidlow's Big Room' and many a banquet or ball took place there. Many notable people of the period spent their holidays there, including the Governors Kennedy, Hampton and Weld and Bishop Parry.

Hunting expeditions were organised at Springfield for the guests which no doubt revived memories of the 'old country' although conditions of course were very different.

On one of these hunts William's only son wandered off in to the bush and was lost. He was found and returned to his father by Moondyne Joe the bushranger.

William and Mary had six children, Mary Ann (who died as a child from a throat infection on board ship to London), Susannah (Mrs. William Paterson), Julia (Mrs David Morrell), Eleanor (Mrs. John Wilkins), Alice (unmarried) and a son William John (who married Christina Ellen Campbell.)

In a letter written by William's daughter Julia, she reminisced about her father.

"On one occasion he was out kangaroo hunting with His Excellency Governor Kennedy, who was riding the racehorse De Crow. The kangaroo were getting away and my father asked His Excellency if he would turn the kangaroo back. His Excellency said "Do so if you can Chidlow, my horse is done" my father then turned them back. He was riding Raglon our old favourite horse.

His Excellency said "I will give you 50 pounds for that horse" Father replied, "I am sorry, your Excellency money would not buy him, he belongs to the children".

William was a keen horseman and had an extensive horse run at Springfield in exporting horses to India and Mauritius. He bred the famous Cape-horses. These horses were a fine breed of animal and were used by Mr. Hunt in his explorations. John Forrest mounted on one of Chidlow's horses began on Eastern exploration from Springfield. Many of William's horses were also used by prospectors.

He was the owner of "Stirling" who won the Queen's Plate (now Perth Cup) for two years in succession 1857 - 58. The beautiful horse was trained and ridden by Joseph Lockyer.

In the census for Toodyay District taken in 1849 William Chidlow's list is as follows :

20 horses,
200 horned cattle
2,100 sheep
20 pigs

under cultivation he has :

25 acres of wheat,
15 acres of barley,
2 acres of rye,
¼ acre Kitchen Garden,
8 acres of green crops.

In his homestead :

5 males over 12
2 females over 12 and 2 below 12 years.

He paid 5 pounds in 1851 towards a licence for 20,000 acres then held.

Late in 1850 William employed the first 'ticket of leave' man to come to Northam. His name was Charles Pye.

The present Northam cemetery was reserved on the Northam edge of the town in 1856. It was at this time the Government decided to commence regular sales of Northam town land. The area chosen for the first sale was near Morby Farm and the Island. William had been trying to buy the remainder of Island Farm that was allocated as Government townsite since 1846. At long last he was able to acquire ownership of his beloved wheatfield by purchasing four large blocks totalling 109 acres. He now owned all of the land between his extensive farm Springfield and the Mortlock River, and the rest of the Island - yet despite his satisfaction there appeared another pin prick.

Surveyor Gregory changed the road that used to pass across the Island - and moved it to a higher position near Morby cottage.

This caused William considerable annoyance as it required him to build new fences and it negated improvements he had made on the old road.

Naturally the Chidlows and the Morrells both preferred the road which was closer to their own homes. This caused some ill feeling between the families. In anger William put gates across the high road and more than once ploughed up the road as it was part of his cornfield. However despite his protests the Government went ahead with the high York Road although it was agreed to retain the use of his bridge and the road across the Island to the ford which the public could still use.

On one of his frequent trips to the coast with his large familty William was not able to find them any suitable accommodation. The town at the time was overflowing with visitors to the annual Fair (now the Royal Show). He made certain he would not be troubled by such a thing again and purchased himself an hotel.

His wife Mary died on July 12th 1862. After her death Alice the youngest daughter went to live with her sister Susannah, in Pinjarra and afterwards at Cottesloe. She made several trips to England and the Continent. Whilst staying with another sister Mrs. John Wilkins of Cunderdin, who had had an accident - Alice suffered an apolectic stroke and died.

The year after Mary passed away in September 1863 Tom Wilding called a meeting at the Avon Bridge Hotel to organise a Northam race meeting. Racing had been popular from early settlement and Northam residents Chidlows, Dempsters, Lockyer brothers and Wilding owned horses which did well in York, Newcastle and Perth races. William offered part of Springfield adjoining the town as a site for a race course.

The first race meeting was held November 2nd 1863. The Sunday Times June 21st 1936 has this to say about William: "Though he did not have a horse racing at the initial race meeting William Chidlow's name figures largely as an owner in reports of race meetings in the 50's and 60's not only in the Eastern districts but also in Perth. Obviously he was an enthusiast of the right type and to his energies and generosity in the olden days, the turf owes a great deal".

The river pools in Northam in the summer became salt, so much so that William had to take his stock daily to water at Burlong Pool - a deep pool four miles away.

In winter however the river runs high and floods are not unexpected. The Avon ran a banker for six weeks in the winter of 1847 and floods re-occurred in 1849, 1857 and 1859.

During June and July 1862 the district suffered disastrous floods. The Avon bridge was washed away and William's old home and mill on Island Farm, which had survived previous floods, went down the river. Only the highest part of Island Farm was above water and the Dudley Family who occupied the old house were rescued by two boats hurriedly constructed from plough cases and crewed by William Chidlow, Fred Morrell and Abraham Morgan.

The house in Island farm was rebuilt. Ten years later it was once more washed away in the most severe flood yet experienced. With the house went the stables and Conners, William's farm man and his wife and child were unable to get away. To rescue them by horseback was impossible, all attempts were useless. Perceiving the immediate danger William sent his son to Northam to fetch help.

This is the wording of the letter that William John wrote to the editor of the Inquirer on July 17th 1872.

Dear Sir,

In consequence of the heavy rain we have been visited by one of the greatest floods we have experienced since the foundation of the colony. The water rising 3'6" above anything known to the oldest settler.

On our own farm - man wife and child had to be obliged to betake themselves to a dray where they were surrounded by water, the two rivers meeting and made it impossible for the stoutest heart to reach them. I swam my horse over to Northam where four carpenters set to work and built a boat in six hours, when myself, J. Byfield and P. Back launched our frail craft and faced the raging stream. I beg respectfully to thank all who gave assistance.

Yours truly,
W.J. Chidlow Jnr.

William Chidlow had most of his letters written by his wife. His considerable business acumen gave him the ability to acquire large areas of freehold and leasehold property, east of the Swan colony. The story is handed down that he carried all his land titles about with him in a pillow slip.

Under original owners 1836-1880 of Freehold Avon locations in the Toodyay Road Board District is the following - (first the lot number then the acreage).

William Chidlow 89 - 40 acres; 116 - 31 acres;
119 - 10 acres; 304 - 100 acres;
306 - 40 acres; 307 - 80 acres;
356 - 472 - 40 acres; 520 - 40 acres
and after 1870
543 - 40 acres; 702 - 180 acres
731 - 74 acres; 732 - 80 acres;
747 - 100 acres.

William, a dynamic man involved himself in many different areas. His name appears on nearly all community committees - he seemed to be involved in all aspects of community affairs including being one of the founders of St. James Church. When this original church was pulled down in 1904 and resited, a memorial was built in 1906 on the old site near the Northam Cemetery. The memorial plaque was erected through the efforts of David Morrell and George Throssell.

Northam's first secondary industry - a steam flour mills was opened early in 1867 by Tom Wilding. It was one of the largest and best in the colony. Unfortunately Wilding was not a popular business man. Northam wheat producers would rather take their wheat to York or Guildford. The Northam Co-operative Steam Flour Mill Company was floated between the townspeople and the Directors of the Company (one of whom was William Chidlow) to organize another flour mill.

However Wilding out manoevred them.

In the end the syndicate bought his mill for two thousand three hundred pound.

This mill venture was also unsuccessful. It was decided to wind up the company.

William offered to buy the mill for two thousand pounds and this offer was accepted by the Directors.

Applying his usual tenacity, and attention William managed to provide a good service. So good in fact that he was known as "General Grinder".

He produced fine quality flour, a most important commodity and a major factor for the sale of Northams wheat crops.

There was a perennial shortage of drinking water. In the summers the water situation could become desperate. The river became a series of pools, many of which were stagnant or fouled by agricultural activity, or else were brackish. In fact the Mortlock was called by Mary as the "Salt" river. Permanent springs and dug out wells were much prized.

William Chidlow was experienced at sinking wells and the Northam townspeople relied heavily on wells which were sunk by him and Fred Morrell for their usage. Chidlow's well sunk in the river bed opposite one end of Island Farm later became the official Government well.

With unwearying energy that he had applied to his many and varied activities William wrote to Governor Robinson early in 1876 requesting a grant of 70 acres of land south west of Northam townsite. He had found a good volume of water there and he offered to erect a pump and build a tank to hold 400,000 gallons of water for use by the townsite. He detailed how he would accomplish this. On January 25th 1876, 23 local residents signed and sent a petition to the Governor requesting that the scheme to erect a water tank by William Chidlow be granted and he be allowed to purchase the land requested. They wrote how they had to cart water a great distance, how their own wells were brackish and Chidlows water tank would save labour and expense and prevent much sickness.

The Government seriously considered granting the proposal.

George Throssel, however was firmly against the water tank idea. He was concerned at fifty town and twelve suburban blocks being owned by one individual, and he suggested that William only wanted to clear the land so that he would have plenty of free timber for his flour mill.

A public meeting was called chaired by Throssell. G. Christmas proposed that William Chidlow's scheme be adopted and was seconded by Fred Morrell. George Throssell spoke against the proposal. The motion was lost by two votes. A disappointed William abandoned the scheme.

At Springfield on June 6th 1879 William Chidlow died. He was aged 72 years, leaving one son and four daughters. For a period of three months before his decease he had been gradually declining in health. His fine constitution throughout his life had been beset by many trials to which he had been subjected in common with most of the early settlers. If less toil and more regard for self had been his care he no doubt would have lived a longer life. His death was a sad blow to the community for he had given it long and generous service. On many occasions he had provided assistance for improvement of the town and his happy nature and warm hospitality had won him general popularity in his later years.

WAT 13/6/79 'Mr. Chidlow was no political agitator, indeed he seemed to be little troubled by the management of public affairs. He had a little world of his own which absorbed all his energy and attention and to which he continued to devote himself with assiduity. Many a struggling settler has been deeply indebted to him for assistance in time of need, while his hospitality which knew no limit was extended without ostentation to the most exalted in the colony and with equal liberality to all. The funeral which took place on Sunday last was about the most numerously attended of any that have taken place over the hills, many of the most influential settlers from York, Toodyay and Northam and its neighbourhood being present all fully impressed with the conviction that the grave had closed upon one whose memory will be long and deservedly cherished'.

This article was researched and written by Sylvia Chidlow who gathered information from the following sources

BATTYE LIBRARY
NORTHAM CEMETERY
CHIDLOW FAMILY RECORDS
'OLD TOODYAY AND NEWCASTLE' Rica Erickson
'NORTHAM AN AVON VALLY HISTORY' Donald S. Garden
NARROGIN ADVERTISER